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Adolescence is often seen as the healthiest time of life. However, it is also a time of engaging in behaviors that may be associated with health risks. Poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, and tobacco use contribute to the vast majority of disease in Indiana. In fact, seventy-five percent of the leading causes of death and ill health among 10-24 year olds (an estimated 1.3 million adolescents) in Indiana are related to behaviors that are preventable. Choosing good health is easier for adolescents when they are provided with the knowledge needed to make good choices and the skills required to put those choices into action. Adolescents connected with trusted adults, communities, and schools serve as a preventive measure against many health risk behaviors.

According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, more than half of high school students eat a meal with their families every day, and 71 percent prefer a home cooked meal to take out or fast food. Frequent family meals decrease adolescent risk of substance abuse, sexual activity, depression and suicide, violence, school problems, and obesity. Young people who have frequent family dinners have higher commitment of learning, self-esteem, and a sense of support from their community. So, take the time to sit down to a healthy meal together.

Talk to your adolescents about the risk of smoking, and be an advocate for increasing the price of tobacco products to prevent youth smoking. The American Lung Association reports that tobacco use during childhood and adolescence produces significant health problems among young people such as an increase in the number and severity of respiratory illnesses, decreased physical fitness, and potential retardation in the rate of lung growth. Most importantly, adolescence is when an addiction forms which often persists into adulthood. Tobacco use in adolescence is also associated with a range of other risky, health-compromising behaviors, including being involved in fights, carrying weapons, engaging in high-risk sexual behavior, and using alcohol and other drugs. Fifteen years of evidence tells us that for every 10 percent increase in the price of cigarettes, we will see a 7 percent drop in youth smoking and a 4 percent drop in adult smoking.

Adolescents are less likely than any other population to receive routine primary and behaviors health services. Barriers to receiving medical care for adolescents include lack of knowledge about health and healthy lifestyles, location of health care offices, hours of operation, lack of health insurance and concerns about confidentiality. The Indiana Family Helpline at 1-800-433-0746 is a resource families can use to learn more about what health and education services the state can provide.



A collaborative effort of organizations and agencies throughout Indiana who serve youth in a variety of capacities and share the common goal of improving the health of adolescents have formed the Indiana Coalition to Improve Adolescent Health. This coalition comprises numerous organizations from throughout the state, with an ever growing membership. This Coalition was formed with the goal of publishing the first strategic state plan for adolescent health in Indiana, joining the elite group of only five other states to have published such a plan. It is important to recognize and remember that adolescents and emerging adults are not problems to be fixed, but assets of our state that need to be nurtured.

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